

Mp3 Michael Kurek: Trio And Violin Concerto - Classical: Contemporary



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musicstore.connect.com/album/500/000/000/000/020/927/886/500000000000020927886.html Here are notes by the composer for the two works on this CD, followed by biographical information: Trio for Violin, Violoncello, and Piano by Michael Kurek Performed in concert by Carolyn Huebl, violin; Felix Wang, cello; and Melissa Rose, piano. I. Pas de deux II. Le piquenique (Picnic) III. Igie IV. Plein de dsir (Longing) My first piano trio is my most extensive chamber work to date, lasting around forty minutes. The outer two movements are longer and tend toward the tragic and serious, while the inner two are lighter and more tender, respectively. People familiar with my work know that in recent years I have been exploring what turns out to be the difficult craft of traditional tonal composition. I say difficult partly because, for most people, new tonal music tends to invite comparisons more easily and reveal its flaws more transparently than less-familiar modernist and avant-garde styles, even though the latter can be equally derivative or flawed without so many people recognizing it. However, a works stylistic influences, or who it sounds like, seem to me far less important in the end than simply whether it is a compelling piece of music to hear. I

would like to think that a few neo-traditional voices like mine can contribute some musical diversity within this new century's contemporary music circles. However, I have gone in this direction primarily because it is where my artistic inclinations have led me, and it is what I enjoy writing, being a melodist at heart. Of course it is not my intention merely to present melodies but rather to engage the listener in a dramatic argument throughout a long form, cultivating the contrapuntal and harmonic character development of those melodies toward a dramatic climax. This sometimes entails quite a workout for what might otherwise be some simple tunes. Nonetheless, I hope that the music is fundamentally tuneful and emotionally evocative. Neither do I intend to imply through these remarks that the music was composed to demonstrate a set of ideals, as strongly as I may hold them. Rather, I offer this music in the same way it was composed, simply as music-making for the listener's pleasure, like a lovingly prepared four-course meal, and with a *Bon appétit!* As its title, the ballet term "Pas de deux" (step for two), implies, the first movement was conceived as a potential ballet duet, whether real or imagined. I assumed when I composed it that any choreography would only be imagined, but then it turned out that the movement was first presented by the Nashville Ballet to choreography by the distinguished Canadian choreographer (now based in Portland, OR) Sarah Slipper. The scenario I originally envisioned was a poignant and dramatic farewell between ill-fated lovers, with the male dancer's role represented by the cello and the female by the violin. I constructed the movement in traditional sonata form with three themes, all introduced by the two string instruments. The first theme alternates between them in dialog, each part continually echoing the cellos first, two-note calling motive; the second theme at last joins the lovers on the same melody; and the third is stated by the violin, with a cello countermelody. After fragments of these themes are developed in an increasingly turbulent musical discussion, the climactic return of all three intact themes (the second and third now played simultaneously) further intensifies the lovers' conversation. But, thanks to the wordless mystery of both music and dance, we cannot tell exactly what they are saying. The second movement is titled "Le piquenique" -- I decided it would be more consistent and not out of character with my musical influences to maintain French titles for all the movements. The score is marked *scherzando giocoso* and entirely departs from the scene of the *Pas de deux*. It was inspired by, and dedicated to, a group of dear young friends with whom I had a most joyous picnic one beautiful September day in Nashville's Edwin Warner Park. As if wildly romping through that huge, open field (and several keys!) to our picnic site, this music recalls for me all the anticipation, excitement, and

tender enchantment of that afternoon. It felt as charming and fresh as being magically transported into a sunny poppy field painted by Monet. Continuing my exploration of traditional forms, I designed the movement as a large rondo in three parts (ABA - C - ABA), where C is a new theme contrasting from the refrain (A) more distinctly than does B. I imagined the third (primarily slow) movement, *Igie*, as a kind of continuation of the first movement, that is, another scene in the same imaginary ballet story, and it was actually the second movement to be composed. The conversational style that begins the first movement also begins the third, this time with the violin speaking first. The lovers words are filled both with mourning and consolation. Perhaps they are now apart, and separately each is only imagining speaking to the other. After the opening idea is stated in dialog and then together by the two strings, the piano introduces a gentle second theme, something like a very slow dream-waltz, which is subsequently taken up by each of the strings. Then the two themes are combined, one in each string part, and repeated with the roles exchanged, the players finally joining together on the last part of the waltz theme for the climax of the movement. (So the form is essentially ternary: A, B, A+B.) This movement, like so many others of mine, was conceived in, and surely colored by, the haunting environs of Savannah, Georgia. This time I was exploring a dense, semi-tropical glade on Cockspur Island and suddenly found myself in a small, secluded clearing, closely surrounded by giant palmettos, whose fronds seemed to cast the long slices of their exotic shadows upon my soul. This music rather involuntarily began to flood into my mind, as music always seems to do in Savannah, and so I kept returning to the same spot, complete with folding chair, to work on it, and then completed it in Nashville. The finale of the trio is titled *Longing* -- in French, *Plein de dsir*. It begins as a fast movement with an agitated first theme in the violin, but then the cello introduces a slow second theme. For me, the two themes have the character of two different kinds of longing, the first urgent and conflicted, and the second lovingly yearning. These themes eventually interact in a kind of conversation about longing that is central to the movements conception and sonata design. A simpler and more optimistic closing theme is briefly introduced by the solo piano to complete the exposition of themes. The development section and recapitulation grow increasingly stormy, until the sunny closing idea ultimately emerges as an expanded coda. With its reassuring rays, so to speak, this coda is intended to provide in the broadest sense a triumphant and life-affirming conclusion both to this movement and to the entire work. Concerto for Violin and Orchestra, Version for Violin and Piano (Tracks 5 - 7), by Michael Kurek Recorded by Kathryn Eberle, violin, and John Blacklow, piano I. *cantabile* -- *appassionatamente* II.

affettuosamente III. furiosamente This concerto, my first for violin, was commissioned during for the gifted young violinist Kathryn Eberle. I regard this work as a breakthrough in my several-year evolution from my former 20th-century modernism to a personal, emotional, tonal, narrative, traditional musical vocabulary. The first two, lyrical, movements were conceived and largely written during holidays sitting in a beach chair at my own special place of haunted solitude, the Old North Pier of Cockspur Island, Georgia, where the Savannah River meets the Atlantic Ocean, near my parents home in Savannah. The third movement, a fantastic struggle between a fast and a slow theme, was written during the winter months in Nashville. Kathryn has performed the concerto with orchestra but also in the present version with piano in New York, Los Angeles, Cleveland, and other venues around the country, and both of us regard it as her concerto.

About Michael Kurek: American composer Michael Kurek has steadily earned international recognition through important awards and through the performance, publication, and recording of his works for the concert hall. In recent years he has become known for the evolution of his style from academic modernism to a lush, tonal melodicism, powerfully making the case for greater aesthetic pluralism in the contemporary concert hall. His music has been performed and broadcasted as widely as France, England, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Japan, Korea, Czech Republic, and Russia. In the U.S., it has been broadcasted on NPR and its affiliates, also commissioned and performed by many professional symphony orchestras and chamber ensembles, and at important venues, such as the John F. Kennedy Center in Washington. Several times a guest composer and speaker at universities around the country, profiled in several national music magazines and journals, and an active member of the Recording Academy (NARAS), he has received numerous national composition awards and fellowships, including the highest annual award for lifetime achievement in composition from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, their Academy Award in Music. Michael Kurek studied with European composers Hans Werner Henze and Eugene Kurtz, and with American Pulitzer Prize-winners Leslie Bassett and William Bolcom at the University of Michigan, where he earned the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in composition. Professor Kurek currently serves as Chair, Department of Composition/Theory at Vanderbilt University in Nashville. His music is recorded on New World Records (New York) and published by International Music Service (New York), Lyon and Healy (Chicago), and Spectrum Music Press (Los Angeles). For more information, go to Michael Kurek's website at vanderbilt.edu/kurek.

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